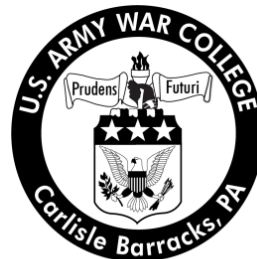


China's Military Transformation – Signaling an Aggressive Global Force Projection Strategy?

by

Colonel Kevin F. Gregory
United States Army



United States Army War College
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**CHINA'S MILITARY TRANSFORMATION - SIGNALING AN AGGRESSIVE GLOBAL
FORCE PROJECTION STRATEGY?**

by

Colonel Kevin F. Gregory
United States Army

Commander J.J. Patterson
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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There has clearly been a shift in the Chinese Grand Strategy since 2000 as a result of its rapid growth. In 2003, President Hu talked of "peaceful development," but Chinese history and culture, as well as the military transformation which has taken place since 2000, paint a different picture. So what strategy does the PRC's historic military transformation signal and what can be inferred from the available information about the PRC's future strategic intent? Is it one of a "peaceful development" or a more aggressive end marked by the sort of deception advocated by the Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu? To understand where China is going with its strategy, one must review the history that shaped China, their culture and review recent PRC strategy documents, as well as what upcoming Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) leadership changes may garner. Understanding the PRC's military acquisition programs, adjustments to their military strategy and doctrine, and PLA forces' training and exercises also serve as possible indicators. Finally, a review of the PRC's economic trends serves to show whether it will be feasible for the Chinese to execute their future strategy.

CHINA'S MILITARY TRANSFORMATION - SIGNALING AN AGGRESSIVE GLOBAL FORCE PROJECTION STRATEGY?

Since the beginning of recorded history in South East Asia, China has considered itself the "middle-kingdom" and has considered anyone outside its land and people "barbarians."^{1,2} Much of its early growth was through the conquering and subjugation of regional tribes. The 20th Century, however, was not kind to China or its people. It spent much of the 1900's under the influence or occupation of European powers and Japan. So much was the disruption to Chinese society that they have deemed it "the century of national humiliation."³ As the Chinese calendar ushered in the 21st Century, China found itself reaping the benefits of the Deng Administration's economic reforms.⁴ Although many experts have complained of the lack of transparency within the People's Republic of China (PRC), there has clearly been a shift in the Chinese Grand Strategy since 2000 as a result of its rapid growth.⁵ In 2003, President Hu talked of "peaceful development," but Chinese history and culture, as well as the military transformation which has taken place since 2000, paint a different picture. So what strategy does the PRC's historic military transformation signal and what can be inferred from the available information about the PRC's future strategic intent? Is it one of a "peaceful development" or a more aggressive end marked by the sort of deception advocated by the Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu?

As of 2009, China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 8.4% of the world's GDP, up from a meager 1.7% in 1980.⁶ Policy changes around that time triggered an ascension to new economic heights and newfound wealth. Today, as China continues to see the economic gains of globalization, it has started to expand its reach and influence. The PRC's use of the global commons will grow which will require a new

security strategy to support that expansion and related national interests. New international trade relationships and agreements continue to underline the growth of globalization and highlight the global national interests of China. It is only natural to assume that once the PRC leadership feels they can adequately defend their homeland, they will expand their military forces to the point necessary to secure their national interests abroad. The PRC leadership continues to stress the fact that they are pursuing "peaceful development" while their military transformations within the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) reflect a change in their grand strategy and an increasingly more aggressive overtone in their defense strategy.⁷ In order to make an educated guess as to where China is going with its strategy, one must review the history that shaped the nation's strategy. Areas reviewed as part of this paper include Chinese history, culture and an assessment of recent PRC strategy documents, as well as what upcoming Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) leadership changes suggest about their intentions. One must also analyze known military acquisition programs, adjustments to PRC military strategy and doctrine, and PLA forces' training and exercises. Finally, a review of the PRC's economic trends serves to show whether it will be feasible for the Chinese to execute their future strategy.

Historical and Cultural Background.

History. Understanding a country's history enables one to gain valuable insight into the peoples' thinking and the traditions they may draw upon to make strategic decisions or policy. The study of their history offers valuable insight into the PRC's thoughts as it continues to evolve its grand strategy and provides insight into why a military transformation is seen as necessary in their eyes. As early as 5000 B.C., it has

been recorded that the beginnings of today's China started in the Yellow River Valley.⁸ Early Chinese groups drew upon technologies of their time to dominate the region. Much of their military history shows the Chinese as an innovative, warrior based society. For example, the Shang Dynasty, which ruled from 1750-1050 B.C., developed a writing system, used the chariot in warfare, and organized their military units into one hundred man formations for easy accountability and control.⁹ These facts demonstrate a society that valued technology, a strong military, and a sense of structured efficiency.¹⁰ In 221 B.C., the Qin Dynasty unified China and their king became the "Qinshi Huangdi, or "First Emperor of the Qin."¹¹ The "Qinshi Huangdi" established a central government and used legalism as the basis for its governing principles.¹² A strong military was key to their continued reign and was the primary basis of power in their society. Moral virtue became an important characteristic of the rulers, according to Peter Worthing, with much of it drawn from Confucianism, Daoism and/or Legalism.¹³ With a strong military and societal values now part of their society, the Chinese began considering themselves the "middle-kingdom," the "center of the universe."¹⁴ China enjoyed the "middle-kingdom" status for much of its history, spreading its influence throughout South East Asia until the 20th Century.¹⁵

The 20th century was an atypical century in Chinese history and served to shape the Chinese strategy. It was filled with conflict which was in itself not exceptional, but the Chinese were not always on the winning end and lost the rule of their lands for parts of this century. Their culture and country were overrun by several other militaries and influenced by other cultures which led the Chinese to deem it the "century of national humiliation."¹⁶ The 20th Century saw foreign powers such as the Dutch, the Koreans

and Japanese inflict massive destruction and devastation on the Chinese landscape and, at times, the people. The lack of growth in China during this century clearly put the Chinese behind in the areas of technology and education. By 1949, the country had survived the Japanese invasion, with help from the allies, had fought a civil war, and formed a new government - the Chinese Communist Party of Mao Zedong. Mao's new government ruled with a socialist agenda and centrally managed the agrarian nation until his death in 1976.¹⁷ During Mao's reign, the PRC did not hesitate to use force when it perceived its national interests were at stake. In October 1950, the PRC invaded Tibet.¹⁸ Less than a month later, People's Volunteer Forces intervened in the Korean War crossing the Yalu River into North Korea to fight UN Forces.¹⁹ The rest of the 20th Century looked much like the previous history of China: continued conflict over borders with regional powers mostly instigated by the PRC,²⁰ "but each conflict revealed the degree to which the PRC relied upon military force to defend its territory and to influence the behavior or policies of China's neighbors."²¹ In 1979, China again went to war, this time with Vietnam to its south over the Vietnam-Cambodia Border in which the Chinese supported Cambodia.²² This invasion of another sovereign country highlighted the continued willingness of the PRC to commit troops in support of Chinese national interests.

In 1978, after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping gained power and created the "Four Modernizations" designed to get China back to its powerful self.²³ By the end of the 20th Century, China was well on its way to becoming the country it once was and a major player on the global stage. History has shown that China is a warrior culture that, once in a position of advantage, has historically used aggressive, offensive tactics to support

its national objectives. In order to continue to grow in this age of globalization, future strategies will require a global force projection capability to protect China's national interests abroad.

Culture. The abbreviated history outlined above highlights the fact China's military played a large role in the development of Chinese society just as it has in many other countries. Just as history shapes society and culture, the culture itself can provide another clue as to where the policies of a nation are directed and why. As mentioned above, China considers itself the "middle-kingdom," but what does that mean in terms of shaping a country's actions and perceptions? According to Richard D. Lewis, China considers "Chung-Kuo - the middle-kingdom, the center of the universe and the world's oldest culture."²⁴ The Chinese culture views foreigners as "inferior, corrupt, decadent, disloyal, volatile, frequently hegemonic, barbaric and in essence, 'devils'."²⁵ If this is indeed the prevailing cultural view of their society, then this would seem to imply that the Chinese feel they should be leading the world. Lewis also goes on to highlight the fact the Confucianism plays a large role in the way the Chinese society operates and deals with outsiders.²⁶

Confucianism stresses that a stable society is based on unequal relationships and that all people interact in one of five relationships daily. Those relationships are: ruler-subject, father-son, older brother-younger brother, husband-wife, and senior friend - junior friend.²⁷ Understanding where one fits in the relationship matrix is key to a stable society. The western view demonstrated in much of our literature and in the United States Declaration of Independence states "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with

certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."²⁸ This view conflicts with the Chinese and Confucianist values of relationships driving your place in life or as Richard Lewis describes the view in his book, "Starving people are not in a position to exercise human rights."²⁹

To say that the Chinese culture values positions of power and authority and in many ways feels that "subjects" should "give respect" without question may be an understatement.³⁰ Both the history and the culture highlight several telling characteristics: they show a society which believes they are the model society, that society must be militarily strong, and those in a position of power should rule others. Whether the PRC overtly demonstrates this behavior or not, these cultural factors offer insight into possible future Chinese strategies and intent.

Geo-Strategic Position. Just as much of a country's culture is shaped by history, that history is shaped by the country's geo-strategic position. A country's geo-strategic position also plays a large role in its development of strategy. The mainland of China is made up of a large land mass with varying types of terrain. A long coast line on the country's eastern side has required a degree of sea-faring ability to be maintained within its society. Throughout history, the Chinese have maintained a large ground force and to varying degrees, depending on the time in history, a maritime force. The need for a maritime force has grown in recent history due to globalization and the spread of China's national interests abroad. As it continues to gain global influence, the need to protect its national interests abroad becomes more and more poignant with increasing security demands, so it is not unreasonable to assume that China deems military

transformation of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) a necessity.

Geo-strategically, the Chinese must feel as though the United States is practicing the old US-Soviet policy of "containment" against them.³¹ Currently, the United States maintains bases with land forces on three sides of China. In the west, the United States continues Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, while in the south US forces serve in the Philippines, Thailand and possibly in the near future Australia.³²



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Figure 1:

To China's east, US military assets operate in South Korea and Japan. Another point of friction on the geo-strategic playing field is the United States' support for Taiwan and the continued sale of US arms to Taiwan. China views the sale of arms and overt support of Taiwan as a clear threat to China's sovereignty. Whether or not by design, geographically, the Chinese find themselves surrounded by US Forces.

Mainland China, highlighted by the above map, is in a challenging position in South East Asia. The western region of China is bordered by six other countries and the Himalaya Mountains. India, which has an ongoing border dispute with China, borders China in the west and south. Out of the other five countries on the western border of China, the United States has forces present in two of them. To the north, the Chinese face competition in the form of Russia and a split Mongolia. Mongolia and China have had a history of conflict and part of the northern provinces of China have a large Mongolian ethnic population which further complicates the situation.³⁴ The eastern region of China borders the ocean and finds a western Pacific currently dominated by the United States Navy and allies. Taiwan, which has traditionally enjoyed close ties with the US, sits a short distance off the east coast. United States military forces have bases in Japan and South Korea a mere couple hundred kilometers away from the Chinese mainland.

The southern region offers more of the same: a contested South China Sea, no real support or friendship from India - a growing military power itself, and again the United States Navy and its allies.³⁵ In 1979, the Vietnamese and China engaged in a border conflict that lasted a little over two weeks and saw the PLA capture two key Vietnamese Cities.³⁶ The Chinese were attempting to relieve pressure on Cambodia's

Khmer Rouge faction which was also at odds with Vietnam.³⁷ Again, China has an adversarial relationship with its neighbor and attempted to use force to compel Vietnam to bend to its will.

With its geographical location, and having battled many of its neighbors, it is easy to see why China feels the need for a defensive force and why the ability to deny the US military freedom of maneuver in the region would be very beneficial. China feels, and from the evidence above rightfully so, that the United States practices a policy of "containment" with China. The United States contends its policy is one of "engage, but hedge," but for China, which is coming out of the "century of national humiliation," it is important not to lose any sense of power at this point.^{38,39} Additionally, the United States and China have another geographical disagreement which China needs a transformed military to address: the UN Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ).⁴⁰

The UN Charter states that each country has the exclusive right to control the resources within the two hundred nautical mile zone in the oceans and seas surrounding a country for economic reasons.⁴¹ China recognizes the UN Economic Exclusion Zone as sovereign territory and therefore considers any outside military presence a violation of its sovereignty. The United States has, to date, not signed the United Nations Common Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) agreement, but does honor its principles.⁴² The US does not consider intelligence collection as a violation, but China does. China is also experiencing EEZ conflicts with other South East Asian countries over resources in the South China Sea.⁴³ The United States continues to transit the China EEZ with military aircraft and ships and China continues to challenge some of those missions. With their geographical challenges, the history of the last century and

cultural characteristics, it is apparent why the PRC is pushing its military transformation and seeking to expand its power base. The evidence also suggests that once in a position of power, China may become more aggressive in attempting to protect its sovereignty in the areas currently contested.

People's Republic of China Strategic Changes

Transparency has never been a characteristic of the PRC, so there is no specific strategy document available that states this is China's grand strategy, but due to the growth the country has seen since Deng started his progressive policies, China has continued to focus on a few key principles. Deng's objective was to transform "Chinese agriculture, industry, science and technology, and military" in order to support the Chinese grand strategy of accumulating "comprehensive national power."⁴⁴ Whether Deng anticipated the outcome or not, his policies have led to a China that ended the 20th Century as a rising global power with a sphere of influence reaching well beyond South East Asia. By the end of the 20th Century, the PRC realized that the quick growth was putting it on a crash course with other powers in the Pacific, namely the United States, and that such a clash could trigger an arms race it could not yet afford.⁴⁵ In order to attempt to counter this growing perception, in 2003 President Hu Jintao introduced the doctrine of "peaceful development."⁴⁶ This meant that "in contrast to the warlike behavior of previous rising powers, China's ascendancy will be entirely peaceful," which sincere or not, as outlined previously, signaled the evolution of the Chinese grand strategy.⁴⁷

On September 23, 2009, Chinese President Hu Jintao spoke to the UN General Assembly in New York.⁴⁸ His talking points focused on "peaceful development" and

highlighted four points that will enable the world to grow together in a peaceful, prosperous manner:

First, we should view security in a broader perspective and safeguard world peace and stability. Second, we should take a more holistic approach to development and promote common prosperity. Third, we should pursue cooperation with a more open mind and work for mutual benefit and common progress. Fourth, we should be more tolerant to one another and live together in harmony.⁴⁹

Although Hu Jintao expressed these steps to further world peace, prosperity and harmony, the PRC military transformation strategy suggests a Chinese grand strategy consistent with its historical roots, requiring a strong military.

Although not an official PRC National Military Strategy, "China's National Defense in 2010 (CND10)" has served as the world's window into the PRC military transformation and guiding principles.⁵⁰ According to Dr. Davies and Andrew Rothe, "its contents closely parallel its 2008 predecessor (CND08)."⁵¹ So what does the CND2010 say about its national defense policy?

In the face of the complex security environment, China will hold high the banner of peace, development and cooperation, adhere to the concepts of overall security, cooperative security and common security, advocate its new security concept based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation, safeguard political, economic, military, social and information security in an all-round way, and endeavor to foster, together with other countries, an international security environment of peace, stability, equality, mutual trust, cooperation and win-win.⁵²

"We need to be careful-it's easy to make the mistake of focusing on what is said rather than what is being done."⁵³ From a military transformation and strategy standpoint, the actions of the PRC suggest they are focused on learning from the west, using and copying technologies from the Russians, and transforming to a US force projection capability to support their national interests.

People's Republic of China Military Transformation

Military Lessons Learned. In order for the PRC to realize its goals and objectives outlined in their CND2010, China must gain capabilities similar to those of the United States. The Central Military Committee (CMC) has pushed the PLAAF and the PLAN to adopt new doctrine, acquire new systems and equipment and develop new training methods and doctrine to support the growing professional military force it will need going forward in the 21st century. To better understand the needed capabilities they would like to acquire and where the western vulnerabilities may lie, the PRC has studied recent military conflicts in order to identify lessons that would aid their modernization. Three conflicts in the past 30 years have shaped their perceptions of what is needed: the Falkland/Malvinas War, Kosovo, and Operation Desert Shield/Storm.⁵⁴

During the Argentina/UK war in 1982, the PRC watched the UK move some 8,000 miles away from their homeland and defeat an enemy on its own doorstep.⁵⁵ From this conflict the Chinese learned the importance of logistics, naval air power, high-tech weapons, area denial weapons and the importance of submarines.⁵⁶ This conflict holds several similarities to what each side, the US and China, would face in a Taiwan conflict. Thus, China determined that they must possess the capabilities to deny the US regional bases and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) if at all possible. In order to successfully deny access to US naval power, weapons such as quiet diesel-electric subs, regionally based aircraft, land based anti-ship missiles and mining operations would be needed. China also gained an appreciation for the power of naval airpower as UK naval aircraft provided fleet coverage thousands of miles from home.⁵⁷

The Kosovo Campaign, carried out by NATO forces, provided China with a look at the use and effectiveness of high-tech air power. Although the NATO airpower had a

major effect on the outcome of the operation, the Serbs were able to score some victories that the Chinese noted, e.g., the shoot down of an F-117 Stealth Fighter, the common people's cyber attack on the US DoD systems and the use of deception and camouflage by the Serb forces to avert effective air strikes.⁵⁸ Each of these lessons has given the PRC insight to the most potentially effective asymmetrical war fighting tactics if they are forced to confront the United States in an armed conflict.

During Operation Desert Storm, the Chinese witnessed a high-tech, highly trained joint coalition force defeat a Soviet style deliberate defense supported by Soviet equipment in 100 hours; much of it the same equipment that the Chinese possessed at that time. The primary take away by the PRC was the effective nature of joint operations and combined arms warfare.⁵⁹ From each of these examples and lessons, China evolved their strategy and has worked to attain like capabilities or to counter them.

Acquisitions. With a new appreciation for the types of systems and capabilities the PLA will need, it now understands that it must get away from foreign produced arms. If a country imports all of its arms, it is easy for another country to purchase and test that equipment in order to gain an understanding of its capabilities and vulnerabilities. To that end, China has been seeking an indigenous military industrial complex (MIC) capable of research and development, testing and production since the CCP came into power.⁶⁰ Currently, the PRC military industrial complex is growing not only in production capability, but also in the ability to design, create and test indigenous equipment. Several systems such as the J-10 fighter, the Song-Class diesel-electric submarine, and the Type-052C Destroyer signal a change in capabilities of the PRC's MIC.⁶¹ So it is important that China continue to progress in the area of an indigenous MIC in order to

continue its climb in military standing when compared to other militaries around the world. An innovative, industrious MIC resonates with the culture of the Chinese and supports their "middle-kingdom" scenario in which they lead the known world and protect their lands from the "barbarians."

Leadership. Another possible indicator about the direction of the PRC's grand and national military strategies is the leadership changes set to take place in 2012 and 2013. Prior to 2004, the People's Liberation Army Air Force and Navy served under the command of the PLA Army. The PRC's Central Military Commission (CMC) positions were also filled with PLA Army Officers. Since 2004, several PLAAF generals have been assigned to positions once reserved within the CMC for PLA Army officers.⁶² In 2004, GEN Xu Qiliang (PLAAF) and ADM Wu Shengli (PLAN) were the first to be placed on the Central Military Commission (CMC).⁶³ This year seven of the ten CMC panel members will retire, leaving only three men. Of those three men, GEN Xu (PLAAF), ADM Shengli (PLAN) and Gen Chang (PLA), two will be selected as vice-chairmen.⁶⁴ Whether it is GEN Xu or ADM Shengli, it will place those services in a position of influence that neither has experienced and could clearly signal a change in the focus and direction of the PLAAF and PLAN.

Both the PLAN and the PLAAF have expressed the desire to be separate services at one time or another in the recent past. In 2000, Lt Gen Liu Yazhou pushed for the PLAAF to separate from the regional military commands and form a separate air force.⁶⁵ His proposal gained no traction with the past PLA regime, but with the possibility of more influence in the CMC by the PLAAF that may change. The same will hold true with the PLAN. If ADM Wu is selected to be one of the two vice-chairmen, the PLAN will

have influence over budget, acquisition, manning and research and development directions. Clearly, either one of the PLAAF or PLAN leaders' selection might suggest a shift in the CMC's modernization policies and could signal a change in focus within the PRC's grand strategy.

People's Liberation Army Air Force's Military Transformation

China defines airpower as an overall term for aviation forces belonging to air forces, navies, air defense forces, ground forces and Special Operation Forces.⁶⁶ The PLAAF spent many years as a subordinate to the PLA which controlled the PLAN as well. After the Gulf War in 1991, the PLA and PLAAF saw the need for increased emphasis on air power and began to change doctrine and organizations to implement the new requirements.

China's air force is in the midst of a transformation. A decade ago, it was an antiquated service equipped almost exclusively with weapons based on 1950s-era Soviet designs and operated by personnel with questionable training according to outdated employment concepts. Today, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) appears to be on its way to becoming a modern, highly capable air force for the 21st century.⁶⁷

Just as the leadership changes may signal a continued shift in the PRC's military transformation focus, changes in the types of investments in advanced aircraft and the addition of offensive doctrine signal a shift in the PLAAF's strategy. It is unclear at which point PLAAF strategy and doctrine changed, but most agree that following the Gulf War the PLAAF began transforming.⁶⁸ The PLAAF strategy "evolved from stressing the 'defense' aspect to stressing the 'active' aspect in the form of a more offensively oriented strategy."⁶⁹ Whether the transition in strategy and doctrine took place in the late 1990's or not, the fact is that today the PLAAF has an offensively oriented doctrine.⁷⁰

In order for a new doctrine to work, the PLAAF required an overhaul due to the aging fleet of Mikoyan-and-Gurevich Design Bureau (MiG) aircraft in the PLAAF inventory.⁷¹ The most advanced fighter at that point was the Russian Su-27 and very few of these aircraft were actually in the inventory.⁷² The PLAAF needed to undertake a major force modernization and acquisition process in order to meet the future requirements of China's rise. To address this issue, the PLA purchased additional Su-27s and Su-30MKK/MKK2s from Russia and by 2007 the PLA had 280 such aircraft.⁷³ The Chinese Military Industry co-produced the Shenyang J-11 with the Russians and began producing the J-10, China's first domestic fighter.^{74,75} China answered their remaining shortfall, which is the need for aerial refueling capabilities for sustained operations away from the mainland, with the purchase of six Il-78 Tankers from Russia in 2004 and retrofitting "H-6 bombers to serve as refueling aircraft."⁷⁶ It is estimated that by 2015, the PLAAF will have sufficient modernized aircraft to meet the requirements of their evolved air power doctrine.⁷⁷

The PLAAF's modernization programs are moving forward at a sustainable pace and they will continue to seek technological advances. With the unveiling of the J-XX stealth aircraft, it is clear that China plans on having an air force capable competing with the strongest air forces in the world in support of their doctrine.⁷⁸ The strategy and doctrinal shifts highlight the PRC's understanding of the importance of air power, currently land based, but very soon sea based as well. Changes in CMC leadership and a much advanced, capable PLAAF, coupled with a society that has historically used force to compel its adversaries to bend to its will all re-enforce the point that China's "peaceful rise" may not continue on that path.

People's Liberation Army Navy's Military Transformation

The People's Republic of China's People's Liberation Army Navy is made up of three fleets, the North Sea Fleet, the East Sea Fleet and the South Sea Fleet. Like the PLA and PLAAF, the PLAN is going through a modernization program to bring it on line with other world navies. The PLAN, according to the China Defense White Paper 2010, "endeavors to accelerate the modernization of its integrated combat forces, enhance its capabilities in strategic deterrence and counterattack, and develops its capabilities in conducting operations in distant waters and in countering non-traditional security threats."⁷⁹ Translated into real world actions and supporting training events, the PLAN plans to upgrade its capabilities to assert control of the regional waters surrounding the Chinese mainland and further gain control of its claimed assets in the South China Sea and to protect its interests in the Indian Ocean. Currently, "three main elements highlight China's maritime strategy: military exercises designed for training purposes as well as to act as a deterrent; longer-range power projection experiments; and military diplomacy in the form of port calls and bilateral cooperation."⁸⁰

The PLAN's first mission is to have the capacity to control its waters in and around the mainland and it has also stressed the desire to be able to counter US regional hegemony in regards to Taiwan. Since the days of Mao Zedong, the reunification with Taiwan under CCP control has remained a priority. Currently, the US Carrier Strike Groups possess more capability than the regional abilities of China in and around Taiwan, but the PLAN is working diligently to meet that challenge. In order to address the "blue-water" capability required to secure its growing interests, including Taiwan, China purchased its first aircraft carrier from the Ukraine in 1998.⁸¹ The former Ukraine carrier "Varyag" was not much more than a hull when delivered to the PRC, but

has since grown into a sea worthy aircraft carrier.⁸² In August 2011, the Varyag launched out on its first sea trials.⁸³ In addition to the Varyag, China started an indigenous aircraft carrier production capability as well and the navy is set to acquire one or two aircraft carriers by 2020.⁸⁴ Also, the purchase of the Su-33 from the Russians, already a carrier-capable aircraft and a strong competitor to the US F/A-18, suggests the direction of acquisition and development in which the PLAN is headed.⁸⁵ According to Mathieu Duchatel, "Along with evidence of some very nationalistic analyses coming from Chinese policy circles, all this activity has led some experts to conclude that China is building an American-style navy along the line proposed by Admiral Mahan."^{86,87}

The strategy and systems outlined above point to where the PLAN is headed in the future with the upgrades and acquisitions of its naval forces, but the question remains how long will it take the PLAN to develop and participate in joint naval operations with the PLAAF and the PLA? And how long will it take them to become proficient at the tasks and integration needed to sustain a joint combat operation? Clearly there is the will and an increased focus on the ability to do just that. The latest sea trial of the aircraft carrier suggests that it will sooner or later provide a capability to launch aircraft from the sea and compete and train with the PLAAF. In the past two years the PLAN has increased its ability to coordinate and integrate its naval capabilities through a series of exercises aimed at attaining the stated objectives outlined in the China's National Defense 2010.⁸⁸ In April 2010, ships from all three fleets completed a surface, land based air and sub-surface exercise carrying it "within 140 kilometers of Okinawa, Japan, through the Bash Channel, and toward the Malacca Strait."⁸⁹ During

this exercise the PLAN conducted naval exercises and used land based aircraft to serve as the opposing force against the fleet. In essence, the exercise showed the ability of the PLAN to sail a long distance and project force into regional waters of another country.⁹⁰ These exercises are consistent with the PRC's stated objectives to conduct "military exercises designed for training purposes as well as to act as a deterrent" and this represents just one of several exercises conducted in 2010 and 2011.⁹¹

The PLAN leadership is in a great position to direct the future of the PLAN and its capability. The PRC understands that it will need a very capable navy to secure its interests regionally let alone globally. The PLAN has also increased its production and purchase of a submarine fleet capable of regional operations and now maintains over sixty submarines, both diesel-electric and nuclear. The key pieces of equipment to support the PLAN missions are being put into place: the Aircraft Carrier *Varyag*, the J-11 and Su-33 aircraft, the submarine fleet, and surface fleet to include the arsenal of anti-ship missiles. The exercises highlighted above and the launching of the *Varyag* signal the move toward the objectives of their PLAN and National Military Strategy.

PRC Economics

Deng's plans for the aforementioned "four modernizations" have been touted as the trigger that launched the Chinese economic boom the world has witnessed over the past thirty years.⁹² It is amazing to look at the growth the country has experienced since 1980 and highlights how fast an industrious people can turn an economy around. Between 1980 and 2010, China experienced high annual average growth in its Gross Domestic Product; real GDP in China has grown at an average rate of nearly 10% annually, a feat that has not been matched by any country for such a long period of time.⁹³ Even the Chinese realize that this will not last forever and many of their policies

are aimed at attempting to sustain the growth. Premier Wen-Jiabao stated in March, 2007: "The biggest problem with China's economy is that the growth is unstable, unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable."⁹⁴ Over the last decade, China's defense spending has increased at an annual rate of 12 percent.⁹⁵ The significance of this growth is that it has allowed the PRC to spend more and more money on its national defense during this time period and has supported the much needed transformation of the PLA forces.

Another key factor in assessing where China may go with its grand strategy is globalization. China has amassed its economic power from that globalization and Michael Swain's data serves to highlight that fact: between 1980 and 2006, China's trade as a proportion of its gross domestic product (GDP) grew from 22 to 71 percent. What this statement alludes to is how much of China's economic growth relies on external trade. The importance of external trade, the Sea Lines of Communication to get that trade to China and the required support of the trading partners move China's National interests far from its shores. Therefore, currently without a "blue-water" capable navy, China has no choice but to push the agenda and adopt the strategy of "peaceful development." In the future, with the growth of the PLAN and PLAAF capabilities provided by high levels of defense spending, China will have a choice to make whether they continue their accommodating ascension or take a harder, more demanding line as they have at times historically done.

Conclusion

This paper represents an attempt to illuminate the question "what strategy does the PRC's historic military transformation signal and what can be inferred from the available information about the PRC's future strategic intent?" In doing so, it

demonstrated that the PRC's grand strategy established by President Deng Xiaoping in 1978 of "comprehensive national power" is alive and well. It also established that two themes from China's past ring true today and will likely shape future strategies: firstly, China is a warrior society and once in a position of power, it will assert its will in support of its national interests. Secondly, the Chinese still believe that they are the "middle-kingdom" and all others are "barbarians." Thirdly, Confucianism's stable society requires unequal relationships. It is from these points that the author suggested that their modernization efforts, namely within the PLAAF and the PLAN, would indicate a future shift from a defensive mindset to an offensive mindset supported with force projection capabilities to protect its expanding national interests.

The PRC has acquisition programs in place to produce fourth and fifth generation fighters like the J-10 and reported J-XX stealth aircraft.⁹⁶ The PLAN will soon have at least one operational aircraft carrier and several versions of aircraft capable of operating from its deck.⁹⁷ As Ward notes:

The current emphasis on peaceful ascendancy will therefore likely satisfy Chinese interests until it becomes a true power-political rival of the United States. At that point, Chinese grand strategy is likely to experience further evolution. It is still uncertain whether this will entail a turn toward strident assertiveness or deepened accommodation⁹⁸

If the history and culture of China play a key role in determining the answer as this paper indicates, it is clear that the world will soon face a more assertive and, if necessary, combative China.

Endnotes

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⁶ Michael D. Swaine, *America's Challenge - Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 4.

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¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

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¹⁴ Lewis, "When Cultures Collide," 485.

¹⁵ Worthing, "A Military History of Modern China."

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⁴² Ibid.

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